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Report of the Commission on its thirtieth session

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: M. D. **Asthana** (India)

Chapter ____. Economic statistics

National accounts

(Agenda item 3 (a))

1. The Commission considered item 3 (a) of its agenda at its 490th and 491st meetings, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Task Force on National Accounts (E/CN.3/1999/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on milestone assessment of the implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993, by member States (E/CN.3/1999/3);

(c) Report on draft classifications of expenditure according to purpose: classification of the functions of Government (COFOG); classification of individual consumption according to purpose (COICOP); classification of the purposes of non-profit institutions serving households (COPNI); and classification of the outlays of producers according to purpose (COPP) (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/84);

(d) As background documents the minutes of the last two meetings (April and September 1998) of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts.

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Action taken by the Commission

2. The Commission:

(a) Approved the proposal for an updating mechanism for the 1993 System of National Accounts as described in the report of the task force, with one change: the period within which the 24 member countries of the Statistical Commission may approve an amendment of the type "interpretation" or "change" should be extended to 60 days. It was emphasized that all the steps of the amendment process, in particular those calling for review by all national statistical offices, should be strictly observed;

(b) Agreed in principle with the proposed amendment referring to the treatment of financial derivatives. It asked the Intersecretariat Working Group to consider specific comments made by member States and to circulate the redrafted text to all national statistical offices and thereafter to the members of the Commission, in accordance with the agreed procedure as amended in subparagraph (a) above;

(c) Approved the publication of the draft classifications of expenditure according to purpose (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/84). In this context the Commission noted the offer made by the representative of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) to cooperate on a pilot study on how to test the implementation of the classification of outlays by producers by purpose;

(d) Noted the following proposals for further work: gross domestic product volume measures, national accounts and employment, measurement of insurance output, financial intermediation services indirectly measured, asset transfer costs, government accounting, exhaustiveness/measurement of the non-observed economy and dissemination standards;

(e) Recalled that the purpose of the milestone assessment had been to create an instrument to detect progress and/or to identify difficulties encountered by countries or groups of countries in their implementation efforts as well as to focus technical cooperation activities. In view of that the Commission asked the Secretariat to strengthen the analytical portion of future assessment papers, highlighting why progress has or has not been made within or between regions. Individual countries would not be identified in the report. The report should describe the activities undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division and the regional commissions as a result of the analysis of the data used to determine the milestones. The report should be done in close cooperation with the regional commissions;

(f) The Commission asked the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts to determine whether there is a match between its work programme and the needs of countries, particularly those at milestone level 0 or 1. In case of a mismatch, the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts is asked to make the necessary adjustments and to eliminate any existing gaps. Furthermore, this assessment should become a regular part of the milestone report in the future.

International trade statistics

(Agenda item 3 (b))

3. The Commission considered item 3 (b) of its agenda at its 491st meeting, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics (E/CN.3/1999/4);

(b) Note by the Secretary-General on international trade statistics (E/CN.3/1999/4/Add.1).

Action taken by the Commission

4. The Commission:

(a) Agreed that the treatment of electronic commerce in international trade statistics should be clarified, particularly in terms of defining its coverage and methods of data collection; the Commission took note of the plan of the International Statistical Institute and the Statistical Office of Singapore to hold a meeting on the subject in December 1999;

(b) Endorsed the proposed work on the manual for international trade statistics, emphasized the importance of taking advantage of country experiences and requested the United Nations Statistics Division to give special attention in the manual to the measurement of adjustments to customs statistics for balance-of-payments purposes;

(c) Recognized that there would be a continuing need by users for international trade statistics analysed according to the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC);

(d) Considered that it was important to evaluate the usefulness and applicability of trade statistics according to central product classification aggregates for economic analysis, and welcomed the intention of the United Nations Statistics Division to produce a data set of merchandise trade statistics according to the central product classification (goods part) on diskette as an input into reviewing and evaluating that classification and its use;

(e) Reconfirmed its support for the work of the United Nations Statistics Division on producing the planned publication on the statistical territories of the world for use in international merchandise trade statistics;

(f) Agreed that in the short term the Statistics Division should maintain the commodity trade statistics database as it presently exists, but should develop, in consultation with users, a strategic plan for its rationalization, taking account of the continuing need for data according to SITC, as set out in subparagraph (c) above, and providing adequate lead time for users to adjust to the rationalization plan;

(g) Emphasized that the Statistics Division should continue its efforts to make its commodity trade statistics database comprehensive in country coverage, and encouraged countries to provide their detailed commodity-by-partner trade statistics to the Division for inclusion in the database;

(h) Endorsed the efforts of the Statistics Division, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Eurostat to rationalize their data-collection, processing and storage systems to reduce reporting burdens on countries, reduce duplicate processing and to increase the compatibility of their databases.

Service statistics

(Agenda item 3 (c))

5. The Commission considered item 3 (c) of its agenda at its 491st meeting, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (E/CN.3/1999/5).

Action taken by the Commission

6. The Commission took note of the completed activities and proposed schedule put forward by the Task Force for the completion of the draft manual on statistics of international trade in services.